



**The High School
Drop Out:
Vocational
Education Can
Help**

**Illinois
State Board of
Education**

**Department of
Adult,
Vocational and
Technical Education**

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Students reported that their vocational program was an important factor in developing a positive self image. These students felt that vocational education increased their skills in:

**problem solving,
learning to listen,
human relations, and
getting along with others.**

(Carvell & Carvell, 1981)

Voc Ed Can Make a Difference



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Department of
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Section

June, 1985

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Characteristics of Dropouts

A large volume of research has been conducted to identify the major characteristics of high school dropouts. Although the data has been useful in identifying students by the time they legally drop out of school, it has been less effective in identifying students who are in trouble at a sufficiently early age to give them the help they need to stay in school. Given these limitations, a profile of high school dropouts is given below.

Characteristics of the Individual

- History of school absenteeism
- Poor grades
- Low math and reading scores
- Low self-concept
- History of behavior problems
- Inability to identify with other people
- Employed full time while in school
- Low socioeconomic background
- More males than females
- Tend to be members of a minority group
- Feel alienated and isolated

Characteristics of the Family

- Family with several siblings
- Father absent from the home
- Father unemployed
- Father did not complete high school
- Mother absent from the home in early adolescence
- Little reading material in the home

References

- Mertens, D. M., Seitz, P. & Cox, S. (1982). *Vocational Education and the High School Dropout*. Columbus, OH: The National Center for Research in Vocational Education.
- Weber, J. M. & Silvani-Lacey. (1983). *Building Basic Skills: The Dropout*. Columbus, OH: The National Center for Research in Vocational Education.

Reasons For Dropping Out

It is difficult to accurately assess the reasons students drop out from high school. Students generally give socially acceptable reasons or stereotyped explanations for leaving school. Students may be unable to conceptualize and articulate the historical, interpersonal dynamics that led to the decision to drop out. Males frequently cite different reasons for dropping out than females. It has been found that the "real" reasons students leave school are quite different than the stereotyped answers often given.

Males Say They Drop Out Because . . .

- Poor grades
- Didn't like school
- Needed work
- Didn't get along with teachers
- Suspended, expelled
- Needed to support family

Females Say They Drop Out Because . . .

- Marriage
- Didn't like school
- Pregnancy
- Needed work
- Didn't get along with teachers

The Real Reasons Students Leave School . . .

- Isolation
- Boredom
- Dissonance
- Irrelevance

References

- American College Testing Program. (1978). In Keim, D. & Stevenson, A. *A Model for Determination of Student Attrition: Causes and Trends*. North Carolina: State Board of Education. RIVE control number 030680-81,81.
- Resta, M. & Temple, J. (1978). *Dropout Rates Among Students Enrolled in New Mexico Secondary Vocational Education Programs*. Albuquerque, NM: Institute for Applied Research Services, University of New Mexico.
- Rumberger, R. (1981). *Why Kids Drop Out of High School*. Stanford, CA: Institute for Research on Educational Finance and Governance.

What Do Students Say?

Students report that there are twelve factors that contribute to retention in high school. These factors are:

- Financial aid
- Support from other students
- Realistic training related to jobs
- Counseling services
- Program meets expectations
- Teachers talk to students as equals
- Teachers are approachable
- Learning outcomes are clearly defined
- Methods are appropriate for the task
- Sequence of learning is defined and communicated
- Rules are established and communicated
- Performance standards are clearly indicated

References

- Batsche, Catherine. (1985). Indicators of Effective Programming for School to Work Transition Skills Among Dropouts. *The Journal for Vocational Special Needs Education*, 7 (3).
- Carvell, F. & Carvell, J. (1981). *A Study of the Non-traditional and Social Impact of Vocational Education on Individuals in Illinois*. Springfield, IL: Illinois State Board of Education, Department of Adult, Vocational, and Technical Education.
- Lam, Y. & Wong, A. (1974). Attendance regularity of adult learners: An examination of content and structural factors. *Adult Education*, 24, 130-142.

How Many Leave School?

There is a large variance in the percentage of students who leave school. The average dropout rate is frequently given as 26%. However, the rate is as high as 50% in some urban areas. The majority of dropouts leave school in the eleventh grade, most typically at the age of 16 or 17.

The Dropout Problem

Within two years, most students report that leaving school was not a good decision. The unemployment rates for dropouts are twice as high as those for high school graduates and three times as high as those for college graduates. Most dropouts hold jobs as unskilled laborers and report that they are dissatisfied with their work. Males who drop out experience more weeks of unemployment and work fewer hours per week than graduates. Females who drop out receive lower hourly pay than graduates.

Does Vocational Education Make A Difference?

Is vocational education effective in reducing the dropout rate? Although the results of research are mixed, there are several indicators that vocational education does have retentive ability.

It has been found that:

Potential dropouts are more likely to complete tenth grade if they are in vocational education classes.

The dropout rate of students enrolled in business education classes is lower than that of students enrolled in general education classes.

The more vocational classes potential dropouts take, the less likely they are to drop out of school.

Work-study and cooperative education programs motivate potential dropouts to attend school more frequently than general academic programs.

Pre-vocational programs reduce the dropout rate when the program focuses on clarifying career goals

through vocational exploration and on improvement of basic skills.

The availability of a trade and industrial program in a high school is associated with a low dropout rate.

Vocational education contributes to the development of a positive self-image among potential dropouts.

References

- Carvell, F. & Carvell, J. (1981). *A Study of the Non-traditional and Social Impact of Vocational Education on Individuals in Illinois*. Springfield, IL: Illinois State Board of Education, Department of Adult, Vocational, and Technical Education.
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Can Vocational Educators Help?

Definitely! Educators can create an environment that is conducive to retention in high school. There are several advantages to altering the traditional school environment:

Alteration of the school environment for students with differing needs has the potential to improve the school for *all* students.

Changing the school environment will reduce the number of students who express behavior problems in school.

Improvement in the environment helps students assume responsibility for their own behavior.

References

- Maurer, R. (1982, March). Dropout Prevention: An Intervention Strategy for Today's High Schools. *Phi Delta Kappan*.
- Peng, S. & Takai, R. (1983). *High School and Beyond*. Washington, D.C.: National Center for Educational Statistics.

Suggested Practices

The results of recent research give a clear indication of the teaching techniques considered to be most effective in drop-out prevention programs. These practices were reported by students, teachers, and program directors as having a positive impact on retention in school.

Effective Teaching Techniques

Establish rules and communicate them clearly to students.

Identify learning outcomes and acceptable standards of performance; communicate this information to students so they know what is expected of them.

Use instructional methods, procedures, and learning aids that are appropriate for the tasks being taught.

Define a sequence of learning and communicate the steps leading to successful completion; post a written schedule of activities.

Utilize positive reinforcement to increase the probability of appropriate behavior; utilize frequent and immediate reward systems.

Relate learning activities to each student's career plan and goals.

Develop rapport with students; communicate with them on a level that reflects respect for individuals.

Simulate the work environment in the classroom; use a reward and consequence system used in the world of work.

Provide students with information on how, when, and where to obtain assistance in areas such as counseling and financial aid.

Encourage all students to participate in class discussions and demonstrations; utilize active questioning techniques.

Design opportunities for students to succeed.

Select instructional objectives that are appropriate for each student.

Provide numerous opportunities for students to practice tasks in one area before moving on to new areas of instruction.

Reward students for making acceptable progress — not just for successful completion.

Provide sufficient time for teacher-directed, structured practice before students begin to work on their own.

Provide continuous, precise, and informative feedback to students as they perform tasks; don't just assign grades to completed projects.

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- Edmonds, Ronald. (1982, December). On School Improvement: A Conversation with Ronald Edmonds. *Educational Leadership*.
- Murphy, J. F., Weil, M., Hallinger, P., & Mitman, A. (1982, December). Academic Press: Translating High Expectations into School Policies and Classroom Practices. *Educational Leadership*.

Characteristics of Effective Programs

Directors of exemplary programs in the United States were asked to identify those characteristics considered to be the most important in retaining students in school. It is interesting to note that the four program descriptors selected as the most effective were all in the affective domain. In addition, a cluster of content characteristics were identified.

Affective Characteristics

Effective programs were found to focus on the development of:

- Self-concept improvement
- Positive work attitudes
- Interpersonal/life skills
- Motivation

Content Characteristics

Effective programs incorporated these aspects into the curriculum:

- Work experience
- Employability skills
- Basic academic skills
- Job training skills

Teaching Characteristics

Effective programs were characterized by the following teaching techniques:

- Rules were established and communicated
- Performance standards were clearly communicated
- Methods were appropriate for the tasks taught
- Content met student expectations
- Realistic training was provided
- A sequence of learning was defined and communicated

References

- Batsche, Catherine. (1985). Indicators of Effective Programming for School to Work Transition Skills Among Dropouts. *The Journal for Vocational Special Needs Education*. 7 (3).
- Carvell, F. & Carvell, J. (1981). *A Study of the Non-traditional and Social Impact of Vocational Education on Individuals in Illinois*. Springfield, IL: Illinois State Board of Education, Department of Adult, Vocational, and Technical Education.
- Lam, Y. & Wong, A. (1974). Attendance regularity of adult learners: An examination of content and structural factors. *Adult Education*, 24, 130-142.

Programmatic Considerations

Teachers and administrators can design programs to increase the probability that they will have an impact on student retention. Programmatic considerations that have been found to be effective in reducing dropout rates are described below.

Design courses that are realistic and representative of real life situations so that students can readily see the purpose and usefulness of what they are learning.

Integrate instruction in math and communication skills into programmatic units rather than teaching them in isolated units.

Create flexible scheduling alternatives to accommodate students who need to work part-time while attending school.

Provide for school to work transition skill development. Design the vocational program to emulate the conditions of the work environment.

Conduct inservice activities to help teachers identify potential dropouts and ask them to select a student to give special attention during the school year.

Evaluate programs to identify and correct potential problems that contribute to dropout rates.

Involve potential dropouts in leadership activities through vocational organizations and class responsibilities.

Involve students in small group work to encourage peer support and interaction.

Incorporate activities into the curriculum to encourage self-concept development, increase motivation, and refine independent living skills.

Programmatic Considerations (cont.)

Define the mission of the program and obtain commitment to the mission from students.

Implement competency-based instruction to ensure:

- learning outcomes are clearly defined
- the sequence of learning is communicated
- performance standards are clearly indicated
- realistic training is related to jobs

References

- Murphy, J. F., Weil, M., Hallinger, P. & Mitman, A. (1982, December). Academic Press: Translating High Expectations into School Policies and Classroom Practices. *Educational Leadership*.
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- Weber, J.M. & Silvani-Lacey, C. (1983). *Building Basic Skills: The Dropout*. Columbus, OH: The National Center for Research in Vocational Education.

The Illinois Response

Vocational education in Illinois has promoted numerous practices that respond to the needs identified by dropouts including:

Competency based education that is reality based;

Individualized Career Plans (ICP's) that relate instruction to student goals, interests, and needs;

Work-study and cooperative education opportunities;

Sequential vocational programs;

The WECEP program for potential dropouts;

The Early School Leaver Program.



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